



## Des Moines Public Schools

*"Meetings are spread out so we can learn a technique and then come back and share and get advice and help from peers."*

## Initial Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

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### A. About the District

Although the initiative described in this case study was not supported by its AEA or the DE training in the IPDM, it was included as an example of the IPDM for several reasons. First, we wanted an illustration of how a large district could provide collective professional development to a subset of its schools, and second, the district was working with Dr. Beverly Showers, a co-author of the Iowa Professional Development Model, and was thus being asked to implement many of the model components at the same time the initial pilot schools were being oriented with their respective AEAs. Finally, because this project is in its second year, it is the only initiative with summative data to report.

- A. About the District
- B. Applying the Operating Principles
- C. Professional Development Cycle
- D. Observations About the Site Visit

### Description of District

Des Moines Public Schools is the largest district in the state, serving 40,000 students in K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In the spring of 2002, the superintendent and board set reading as a priority throughout the district and set a goal of 75% of all students reading on or above grade level.

The district had multiple reading initiatives in process or in place in the spring of 2002. "Balanced Literacy" was in place in the primary grades and was being extended into upper elementary. Middle schools had regularly scheduled reading classes for all students, although the text-based curriculum was fairly undefined. Readers Workshop was beginning to be implemented as professional development was offered to middle school reading teachers. Middle schools also had in place a remedial course for struggling readers that was staffed at a 6:1 student/teacher ratio. High schools did not have reading scheduled as part of the regular curriculum, but teacher representatives from each staff had attended three days of summer training on Reading in the Content Areas. The intention was that these teachers would teach others at their schools to use the content area reading strategies. Special Education teachers in the district had access to Read 180, a program published by Scholastic. Considerable district resources were allocated to support staff for reading as well -- centrally located at the secondary level and site based at the elementary level.

Second Chance Reading (SCR) was selected by the district to address the needs of students at the middle and high schools reading well below grade level and thus struggling with the requirements of the curriculum. Because this initiative is not a school-wide effort but rather embedded in general school-wide efforts to increase literacy skills, it presents challenges to site leaders and raises issues of simultaneity, two of the operating principles guiding implementation of the IPDM.

Nine middle schools, four high schools and three alternative schools serving adolescents participated in the SCR professional development effort. Pupils served by the program ranged from predominantly white in some schools to predominantly ethnic minority and English Language Learners in other schools. In some of the schools, all students had IEPs, while in others, students were experiencing multiple learning and behavior problems. All students had in common serious reading deficits.

While building principals were asked to administer the SCR program at their sites, there was also support from a district coordinator and a special education coordinator.

SCR is completing its second year in the Des Moines Public School and currently six of the participating teachers are being trained as a cadre of SCR trainers.

### **Department of Education Site Visit**



Department of Education staff met with SCR coordinators and cadre members and interviewed them as a group. Coordinators were then interviewed separately. Coordinators and Dr. Showers visited each of the participating schools and provided additional information to the DE. Teachers participating in SCR from all schools completed a questionnaire providing individual information about their understanding of and participation in various IPDM

components. Finally, extensive implementation and formative data were shared with DE staff at the site visit.

## **B. Applying the Operating Principles**

### **Focus on Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment**

There is a clear focus on curriculum and instruction in professional development in the Des Moines district, a focus which can be attributed to the superintendent's and board's focus on literacy. Not only professional development for SCR but most of the PD provided in the district is in the area of reading.

### Participative Decision-making

No district-wide representative group existed to make professional development decisions in 2002. However, a representative group of teachers, curriculum supervisors and administrators worked with the ISBA Lighthouse Project to determine needs and professional development to address those identified needs. Offerings and programs are chosen at the district level and teachers in some cases may choose to participate while in other cases participation is mandatory. Individual schools may have leadership teams that guide staff development decisions, but we did not encounter them during this study.



### Leadership

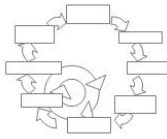
Central office leadership of this initiative has been exemplary. Specific student needs were targeted through careful study of achievement data, goals for student learning were set, programs were purchased, training was provided, and support and facilitation were consistent.

Site leadership of the program has varied widely and has been much less consistent. Significant administrator turnover at the end of the first year necessitated re-training a new group of principals in the goals and needs of SCR. Some principals have been extremely proactive with respect to the SCR initiative, actively monitoring the program and tracking student progress; others have been passive, responding to teacher requests for materials but otherwise leaving teachers to run the program themselves. Although the multiple district reading programs are designed to be complementary, they are sometimes viewed by principals and teachers as competitive, which has created some confusion among leaders about just how to apportion their energies.

### Simultaneity

Some of the secondary principals, especially at the high school level, appear to have difficulty maintaining a focus on literacy issues. There are many competing concerns at the high school level and reading has not typically been a high school concern. Some middle school principals had four different reading initiatives operating in their buildings, and while clearly focused on literacy concerns, found it difficult to support all initiatives appropriately. In a large district, it will be necessary for central office personnel to communicate clearly how various initiatives integrate to meet district goals for student achievement, a message that will then facilitate principals' abilities to set priorities with respect to professional development resources.

## C. The Professional Development Cycle



As is true of all the schools and districts who participated in the initial orientation to the Iowa Professional Development Model during the 2003-04 academic year, Des Moines addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others. Des Moines focused on the On-Going Cycle-- providing continuing learning opportunities, organizing productive collaborative teams, studying implementation, collecting formative data – and combining formative data with program evaluation data.

### Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

Analyses of ITBS/ITED data from 2002, at the district level, revealed a common pattern in the area of reading. At the fourth grade level, 65.4% of students were proficient in reading while at the middle school (8<sup>th</sup>) and high school (11<sup>th</sup>) levels, respectively, 53.6% and 71.5% were proficient. Des Moines Public Schools also has significant numbers of students in all subgroups – low SES, English Language Learners, ethnic minorities, and special education. The percentage of students proficient in reading in these subgroups is:

Grade Level	Low SES	ELL	Minority	SPED
4 <sup>th</sup>	48.6%	45.4%	51.3%	22.9%
8 <sup>th</sup>	35.2%	28.7%	35.8%	12.3%
11 <sup>th</sup>	58.9%	30.0%	57.3%	33.5%

The data were analyzed at the district level but given the diversity present in the district, individual schools reflected neighborhood demographics more than district averages. Thus, individual schools reported quite different needs with respect to the district goals set for reading.

### Goal Setting

As mentioned earlier, the district set an on-going goal of 75% of students proficient in reading. The goal of SCR was to move secondary students reading two or more years below grade level into the proficient range.

For students placed in the Second Chance Reading program, the initial goal was to double their prior learning rate, e.g., if a student in ninth grade was reading at a fourth or fifth grade level, and had a history of growing half a year for every year of instruction, the goal was to accelerate that rate to a year's growth for a year's instruction. The second goal was to move the students to grade level in one to two years. For most students, this necessitated a growth rate of two years growth for one year's instruction.

### Selecting Content

The Second Chance Reading content was chosen by a representative planning group that included the superintendent and other top district administrators, principals, curriculum directors and board members. The review of the data indicated a dip in secondary reading scores. A review of the literature for secondary reading comprehension best practices found that Second Chance Reading was one of the few research-based models. Dr. Showers was invited by this group to present an overview of the program, including research on program elements as well as results in other districts.

## Designing Process for Professional Development

The design for professional development was jointly planned by Dr. Showers, the district coordinator for SCR and the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction. In the first year, three days of training were provided in August, prior to the start of school; two additional days were planned during the academic year and 4 two-hour sessions were provided on early release days. The first three days included a heavy schedule of theory and research, demonstrations, and opportunities for practice. Classroom observations by the trainer and the district coordinators as well as teacher requests provided input for the agendas on days for follow up training.

*Bev provides feedback by doing demonstrations or by addressing problems in large group training. There's lots of retraining, based on observation.*



The trainer met with all principals participating in the program to provide an overview of the program, request their assistance with testing and data collection and invite them to all training sessions.

In the second year, two full days of training were provided teachers new to the program and one day for both returning and new teachers. Severe budget cuts eliminated the two full days of training during the school year but SCR teachers received follow-up support on 4 early release days.

During the second year, a cadre of Des Moines teachers began training with Dr. Showers in preparation for assuming future training, follow-up and support duties.

## On-Going Cycle

Learning opportunities continue through the school year following initial training in the summer. In the first year, teachers had two full-day training sessions and four early release sessions. During year two, teachers had four early release sessions. In year three, the two full days for new teachers will be reinstituted and cadre members will facilitate early release day sessions.

*In special education you are not taught how to teach reading. This provided a focus and a structure for how to teach reading.*

The schedule for learning opportunities and collaboration were combined on the PD schedule for the year:

- ☐ Daily team meetings (one per week dedicated to reading) – 40 minutes
- ☐ District PD Days – seven (of which two were devoted to training in reading strategies)
- ☐ Six two-hour late start sessions – total of four hours devoted to reading strategies

All teachers are expected to attend training in learning strategies.



## Collaboration and Implementation

Collaborative teams were difficult to establish for the SCR initiative because only two to six teachers were participating in many of the schools and in some cases, there was only one teacher in a school. When an entire school is not engaged in an initiative, collaboration times for small groups tend to be ad hoc rather than built into the school's schedule. Extensive efforts by the district coordinator ensured that teams were available for all teachers and 37 of the 42 participating teachers attended team meetings fairly regularly.

Teams rotated leadership tasks, with different teachers running the agenda at each meeting. The plan called for weekly team meetings but some of the teams in which teachers had to travel between schools in order to meet met bi-weekly. Special education teachers met bi-weekly as a group and with their school teams in intervening weeks. Minutes were recorded for each meeting and an agenda was set for the following meeting. Initially, meeting times were used primarily for sharing of experiences and solving of logistical and management problems. With continued urging and modeling, agendas gradually became focused on lesson planning and development and data analysis. Analysis of minutes from meetings allowed the facilitator to monitor tasks addressed during collaborative times. (See appendix for example of minutes.)

*The small groups at our schools are just as important as the large group. We always have an agenda, work on planning and development of lessons. We bring stories, discuss, choose and develop together.*

An implementation plan was presented to all teachers during summer training (see appendix). Teachers were asked to follow the plan as closely as possible, although the special education coordinator worked with special education teachers to make appropriate adjustments.

*This is better than mentorship – this gives you automatic mentors.*

During the first year, implementation was monitored for frequency of use of the various strategies and for adherence to the implementation plan. In year two, quality of lessons was analyzed as well. (See appendix for procedures and forms.)

## Formative Data Collection

As in all Iowa districts, the ITBS/ITED is given annually and used to determine program effectiveness. In Des Moines, additional program evaluation data were collected. In Year 1 of the project, a district-developed Criterion Referenced Test was administered pre and post to all SCR students, and in Year 2 the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) was given pre and post.



In Year I, SCR teachers implemented the program for periods varying from three to nine months, with an average of about five months. (Variations in implementation periods were due to training schedules, staffing issues, and school schedules.) Results for SCR students on the criterion referenced test are below: (The test is not standardized so it is not possible to compare these gains to comparable measures at this point; SCR students gained more than their non-SCR counterparts on the same test, however. Non-SCR students in regular education gained an average of nine points while special education students were not tested on this measure.)

## Regular Education Sample and Subgroups

Sample	N	Mean Pre CRT	Mean Post CRT	Mean Growth CRT
<b>Regular Education</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>14.00</b>
<b>Mainstreamed Special Education</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>11.00</b>
<b>Self-contained Special Education*</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>[4.19 NGE]</b>	<b>[4.6 NGE]</b>	<b>[.41 NGE]</b>
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>72.7</b>	<b>13.0</b>
<b>English Language Learners</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>57.19</b>	<b>70.27</b>	<b>13.0</b>
<b>Ethnic Sub-groups</b>				
<b>White</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>(7)</b>	<b>(63)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(10)</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>14</b>

**\*ITBS Normal Grade Equivalent Scores**  
**(Sample too small for computation of meaningful means)**

In the Fall of 2003, the ITBS/ITED were administered and differences were computed for SCR students between the Fall 2002 and 2003 scores. SCR students in the developing range (below the 41% on the ITBS or ITED) improved an average of one year and two months on the ITBS/ITED measures, an encouraging first year given that the average implementation was slightly over half a year.

*Parents like the charting; it's very graphic and parents are clear how they need to work with students.*

In the second year of SCR, students gained an average of two years in comprehension on the SDRT (a standardized measure). This level of growth was consistent across all ethnic groups and subgroups, with the exception of ELL students, who gained 1.1 years in reading comprehension.

*It's very interesting. I like doing it and seeing results. It keeps us on task. Students have to collect data also, it serves as motivation.*

**Mean SDRT *Growth* for SCR Program in Normal Grade Equivalents  
Full Year Regular Education with Mainstreamed Special Education**

Sample	N	Vocabulary			Comprehension		
		Pre	Post	Growth	Pre	Post	Growth
<b>Regular Education</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>2.1</b>
<b>Mainstreamed Special Education</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>English Language Learners</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>.8</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>1.1</b>
<b>Ethnic Sub-groups</b>							
<b>White</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>(4.6)</b>	<b>(6.4)</b>	<b>(1.9)</b>	<b>(3.5)</b>	<b>(5.9)</b>	<b>(2.4)</b>

### Teacher Implementation of SCR

Teacher implementation of Second Chance Reading was examined to determine the extent to which students experienced the intended treatment. In this program, implementation scores were computed for teachers based on the frequency and skill with which they used program components. SCR teachers were also expected to attend all training sessions and to work in collaborative teams with their peers to increase the probability of a successful program implementation.

*At the end of the first year, I realized I was successful. First-year teachers don't know if they're being effective.*



**Correlations of Teacher Implementation of SCR with Student Achievement,  
Attendance at Training and Participation in Collaborative Teams**

	<b>All Teachers (N=39)</b>
<b>Student Achievement</b>	<b>.3*</b>
<b>Attendance at Training</b>	<b>.4*</b>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>.5**</b>

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Implementation of the SCR program was good overall, with 34 of the 39 teachers achieving a medium or high level of program fidelity. Implementation was significantly correlated with student achievement, attendance at training and participation in a collaborative team, as predicted. In other studies, however, implementation was much more highly correlated with student achievement than in this one. The inclusion of self-contained special education students, with their over-all lower achievement levels and other learning difficulties, may have depressed the correlation of implementation with student achievement.

#### **External Technical Assistance**

External technical assistance on this project was provided by Dr. Beverly Showers, who designed and delivered the training and consulted with district personnel on implementation, collaboration and both formative and summative data collection.

#### **Participant Knowledge of IPDM Components**

At the final meeting of the SCR teachers in April 2004, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire about their experience with their professional development program. Unfortunately, only 22 Des Moines teachers were present, due to a conflict with other district initiatives. (Responses from teachers outside the district were not included in this analysis.)

Twenty-one of the 22 respondents reported they knew the district goal for student reading achievement, although there was confusion about whether the 75% goal was for proficiency (41%) or grade level achievement (50%). Nineteen of the 22 respondents were very clear about the implementation plan. They attributed their clarity to the repeated training design (19), the opportunity to work with peers (16), training materials, and demonstrations and theory presentations (8). Sixteen (73%) teachers reported regular meetings with their collaborative teams. Their most frequent group activities were the planning and developing of lessons (16), sharing strategies and solving problems (5).

Teachers were less clear on how professional development decisions were made at their schools. Five said “the principal decides” and five said “the literacy team decides” while two reported that the principal and literacy team together make PD decisions. Four reported that PD decisions were

made in department and staff meetings. Three stated outright they didn't know how such decisions were made, while others admitted they were guessing.

Teachers described principal support for the SCR initiative in several ways. Six reported "full support" from their principals, five said their principals were "neutral", four said their principals were "accommodating", one said the principal provided no support, and three said their principals provided supplies and let them attend training. One teacher said that school counselors provided the support for the program.

Asked to compare this PD process with their prior experience in PD, fifteen teachers said it was more involved, on-going, hands-on. Three teachers noted, respectively, the expectations for and emphasis on student growth as an outcome of staff development, the demonstrations of new instructional strategies, the provision of a research base, and "more support of all kinds." When asked what had been most powerful in helping them learn and use new content, teachers reported a shared curriculum (5), the training design (5), collaboration (5), and assorted other program components (expectations for student growth [2], strong content [2], and facilitation and support [2].)

## **D. Observations About the Site Visit**

The Des Moines Public School system has successfully implemented the Second Chance Reading program in its secondary schools and has observed significant growth for its older struggling readers. The On-going Cycle of the IPDM (multiple learning opportunities, teacher collaboration, the study of implementation, formative data collection) is in place, thanks to the facilitation of the district coordinators assigned to the project and the support of the superintendent and assistant superintendent. As Des Moines begins its district-wide implementation of the IPDM (Fall 2004), it will need to address vertical integration within the district so that professional development decision making is clarified and more principals are clear on their roles in PD efforts.

Most SCR teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the PD experience and motivated by student learning increases.